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KANT'S MORAL THEOLOGY

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The most generally acknowledged mode of apprehending God or argument for his existence, is the Moral. The argument has various forms, of which the more commonly accepted and influential, in its main principles, is that of Kant. Kant emphatically rejected the traditional arguments for the existence of God — the Ontological, Cosmological, and Teleological — as inadequate and invalid. More generally, he rejected or greatly subordinated the theoretical reason in the sphere of religion, and gave primacy to the practical or moral reason. He went far in teaching that the sphere of science and the sphere of religion are separate and independent of each other.

The essence of Kant's moral argument for the being of God, very briefly stated, is as follows: The *Summum Bonum* of rational creatures is composed of two elements, the one superior the other inferior, the one conditioning the other conditioned. The first is virtue; the second is happiness. Practical reason demands obedience to the moral law; and decrees that the obedient, the virtuous, should obtain happiness that is proportionate to their virtue. Then Kant concludes: We must believe in a God who shall do for the virtuous what nature will not do for them and what they cannot do for themselves; who, because of his supreme intelligence and power and rule over nature, shall secure for them the happiness that should fall to their lot. A God is not needed to make men virtuous, but only to make them happy.

They can be virtuous, or acquire moral law and morality, of themselves; they cannot acquire happiness.

There is much interest in observing the course of reasoning by which Kant was led to the rejection of the common scientific or intellectual arguments for the existence of God and of the employment of the theoretic reason in theology, and to placing reliance upon the practical or moral reason alone.

The first fact to be noticed is Kant's view that the theoretic reason does indeed furnish us with the idea of God as the free and intelligent author of all things. This idea, it is said, is a primitive and necessary conception of reason considered as a faculty distinct from sense and understanding and higher. If reason is excited by the understanding or acts in view of its operations, it still produces the idea entirely from itself, it owes nothing in generating the character of the idea to any influence or communication from sense or understanding or any external source. The idea is the "offspring of reason alone" acting according to its "original laws."

But while Kant thus ascribes to the idea of God so eminent an origin and so special a character, he repeatedly and very earnestly denies that we have in the idea any ground for thinking that there is an object corresponding to it. He denies the possibility of passing, by any legitimate intellectual process, from the subjective idea to an objective being. He asserts that it is "a mere innovation of scholastic wisdom to attempt to pick out of an entirely arbitrary idea the existence of the object corresponding to it"; and again, that God is a "perfectly unknown being," "a something of whose existence in itself we have not the least conception." The question whether there is a real God, or whether it is right or permissible to believe in, or practically to assume, his existence, Kant removes entirely from the determination of the intellect and speculative reason. The speculative reason

creates the idea of God, but gives not the least knowledge or assurance of a being answering thereto. It cannot tell that there is such a being; yet also it cannot tell that there is not.

Still, in the view of Kant, though the idea of God, necessitated by the "very nature" of reason, affords no real knowledge of any being beyond its own subjective self, it has yet a very important regulative office. This great office is to give a systematic unity to the productions or objects of the understanding, or to "finish and crown the whole of human knowledge";¹ to cause the divisions and objects of the universe or nature, as these are severally perceived by the understanding or perceived with imperfect synopsis, to appear as if they formed together the creation and systematic construction of a free and intelligent Supreme Being. In short, the idea gives "order and system," a collective unity, to the world; especially a teleological unity, which is the highest mode of unity, making the world seem the "artistic edifice" of a divine Author.²

¹ Pure Reason (Müller tr.), p. 515. Reason prescribes "to the understanding the rule of its complete application" (p. 463). It "frees, it may be, the concept of the understanding of the inevitable limitation of a possible experience" (p. 330).

"All our knowledge begins with the senses, proceeds thence to the understanding, and ends with reason. There is nothing higher than reason, for working up the material of intuition, and comprehending it under the highest unity of thought" (p. 242).

All future quotations from the *Die Kritik der reinen Vernunft* will be made from Müller's revised translation.

² "The supposition, therefore, which reason makes of a Supreme Being as the highest cause, is relative only, devised for the sake of the systematical unity in the world of sense, and a mere Something in the idea, while we have no concept of what it may be by itself" (p. 545).

"The ideal of the Supreme Being is . . . nothing but a regulative principle of reason, which obliges us to consider all connection in the world as if it arose from an all-sufficient necessary cause, in order to found on it the rule of a systematical unity necessary according to general laws for the explanation of the world" (p. 498).

"We have not the slightest ground to admit absolutely the object of that idea (to suppose it in itself)" (p. 550).

No experience can ever be adequate to "an extension of our knowledge beyond all limits of experience, till it reaches the existence of a Being which is to correspond to our pure idea" (p. 513).

"The concept of an absolutely necessary Being is a concept of pure reason, that is, a mere idea, the objective reality of which is by no means proved by the fact that reason requires it" (p. 477).

Thus Kant contends that, though we have a primitive and necessary idea of God produced by our reason, yet with the idea we have no knowledge of an objective reality. A very important part of Kant's opposition to a scientific or intellectual knowledge of God is his effort to demonstrate the invalidity of the common "proofs" of the existence of God.

The Ontological proof, which has indeed always been but a roundabout way of begging what was to be proved, Kant considers as invalid, on the general principle that we have no authority to affirm the existence of a being merely from the possession of the conception of such a being.

On the Cosmological proof he remarks: "As soon as we suppose that something exists, we cannot avoid the conclusion that something exists necessarily. On this quite natural, though by no means therefore certain conclusion, rests the whole cosmological argument" (*Pure Reason*, p. 495). "It rests on the apparently transcendental law of causality in nature, that everything *contingent* has its cause, which, if contingent again, must likewise have a cause, till the series of subordinate causes ends in an absolutely necessary cause, without which it could not be complete" (p. 487). But the argument is not cogent. We cannot truly rise from the contingent to the necessary, from the conditioned to the unconditioned, from nature as an effect to a supreme universal cause, having no cause above it.

He thus describes the Teleological or Physico-Theological proof:

"There are everywhere in the world clear indications of an intentional arrangement carried out with great wisdom, and forming a whole indescribably varied in its contents and infinite in extent. . . . The nature of different things could never spontaneously, by the combination of so many means, co-operate towards definite aims, if

these means had not been selected and arranged on purpose by a rational disposing principle, according to certain fundamental ideas."

But we cannot approve of the claims which this argument advances.

"The physico-theological proof can never establish by itself alone the existence of a Supreme Being" (p. 503).

It rests upon the Ontological proof. Kant makes note of a particular defect, as follows:

"According to this argument, the fitness and harmony existing in so many works of nature might prove the contingency of the form, but not of the matter, that is, the substance in the world. . . . The utmost, therefore, that could be established by such a proof would be an *architect of the world*, always very much hampered by the quality of the material with which he has to work, not a *creator*, to whose idea everything is subject. This would by no means suffice for the purposed aim of proving an all-sufficient original Being" (pp. 504, 505).

Kant comes to the general conclusion respecting the classic theistic arguments, that "no satisfactory proof whatever, from merely speculative reason, is possible, in support of the existence of a Being corresponding to our transcendental idea" (p. 499).

But the greatest opposition of Kant to the traditional theistic proofs is in the radical principles of his epistemology or theoretic philosophy. These proofs, especially the cosmological and teleological, have been employed for the most part by their advocates upon the assumption that the apparent universe, the apparent cosmos of space, time, and material realities, is external to and wholly independent of our mind; that all its immeasurable extent and duration, all corporeal objects from the least to the greatest magnitudes, in their motions, interactions, reciprocal adaptations, require a cause, as creator, fabricator, and sustainer, infinitely greater than man and

any combination of men. This external nature of immense extent and duration and of marvellous construction is the ground or affords the premises of the proofs.

Kant would maintain an entirely different view. He holds that the supposed external nature is not external, but is really only internal; that it is a system of phenomena or appearances within the mind and produced by the mind—a system of the mind's own states; that all our knowledge is of phenomena in the mind. In particular, he says that space is nothing outside the mind, but is only an *a priori* form of our thought, is wholly subjective.

"Space does not represent any quality of objects by themselves, or objects in their relation to one another; *i.e.*, space does not represent any determination which is inherent in the objects themselves, and would remain, even if all subjective conditions of intuition were removed" (*Pure Reason*, p. 20). "We maintain that space is nothing, if we leave out of consideration the condition of a possible experience, and accept it as something on which things by themselves are in any way dependent" (p. 22).

He asserts likewise of time, that it is only a form of thought, existing entirely within the mind and produced by the mind.

"Time is not something existing by itself, or inherent in things as an objective determination of them, something therefore that might remain when abstraction is made of all subjective conditions of intuition." "Time is nothing but the form of the internal sense, that is of our intuition of ourselves, and of our internal state" (p. 26).

Kant affirms in general:

"What we call nature is nothing but a whole of phenomena, not a thing by itself, but a number of representations in our soul" (p. 94). "The understanding . . . is itself the lawgiver of nature, and without the understanding nature, that is, a synthetical unity of the manifold of phenomena according to rules, would be nowhere to be found, because phenomena as such cannot exist without us but exist in our sensibility only" (p. 103). "Everything which is perceived in space

and time, therefore all objects of an experience possible to us, are nothing but phenomena, that is, mere representations, which, such as they are represented, namely, as extended beings or series of changes, have no independent existence outside our thoughts" (p. 400). "If we take away the thinking subject, the whole material world would vanish, because it is nothing but a phenomenon in the sensibility of our own subject, and a certain class of its representations" (p. 310).

In this manner Kant denies or annihilates the universe of space and matter upon which the ordinary theistic proofs have been grounded. The visible universe is not an existence external to the mind and independent of it and possibly the work of a divine cause, but is only an appearance within the mind, and the product, in matter and form, of the mind's faculties of sense, understanding, and reason.

Thus all our knowledge is of phenomena in the mind, subject-objects. But yet Kant plainly asserts the existence of things that are external to or independent of the mind; though they are unknowable, and therefore incapable of being the medium of the cognition of anything else. There are objects that affect our senses and occasion the rise of sensations and perceptions; but the sensations and perceptions or phenomena they occasion in us give us no knowledge of them. We know at most only that they exist. Our knowledge is rather of what they are not than of what they are; for we know that they are not spatial and temporal, because space and time belong only to phenomena and are "met with nowhere except in ourselves" (p. 303). "It must not be supposed," says Kant, "that an idealist is he who denies the existence of external objects of the senses; all he does is to deny that it is known by immediate perception, and to infer that we can never become perfectly certain of their reality by any experience whatsoever" (p. 299). Again: "I certainly admit that there are bodies outside us, that is,

things, which though they are wholly unknown to us, as to what they may be in themselves, we cognise through presentations, obtained by means of their influence on our sensibility." They are "to us unknown, but not the less real."³

Though Kant affirms in many plain and positive statements that all our knowledge is of internal appearances, subjective objects, states of the subject, and that nature is the "sum total of all phenomena" and is made by the faculties of the subject, yet he is far from maintaining self-consistency in his utterances. He is found to say: "This present world presents to us so immeasurable a stage of variety, order, fitness, and beauty, whether we follow it up in the infinity of space or in its unlimited division, that even with the little knowledge which our poor understanding has been able to gather, all language, with regard to so many and inconceivable wonders loses its vigour" (*Pure Reason*, p. 500); and speaks of the "wonders of nature and the majesty of the cosmos" (p. 502). In a notable passage he declares: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: *the starry heavens above and the moral law within.*"⁴ Again he avers that our belief in a supreme Author of the universe rises to "an irresistible conviction" (*Pure Reason*, p. 502). He says also: "The belief in a great and wise *Author of the world* has been supported entirely by the wonderful beauty, order, and providence, everywhere displayed in nature" (p. 702). Here we have instances of the profound inconsistency and self-contradiction of Kant's exposition. This admired world around us and the starry heavens above are, according to his fundamental teaching, his fundamental idealism,

³ Prolegomena (E. B. Bax tr.), p. 36.

⁴ Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and other Works on the Theory of Ethics, Translated by T. K. Abbott, B.D., p. 260. All citations hereafter from Kant's ethical works will be made from this translation.

not around and above us at all, but wholly inside us. This apparent space of illimitable extent and illimitable division is nothing but a form of our subjective thought, having no existence outside and independent of our mind. All this order, variety, beauty, all these wondrous forms and majesty of nature, have no external being, but are altogether a system of appearances within, and the production of, our "poor understanding." We have not the "slightest ground to admit" the existence of a divine author of the universe. By this mode of reasoning the traditional arguments for the existence of God are by Kant proved invalid, because they are rendered useless and futile. Their ground or their resources are entirely taken away from them. No place is left, no requirement remains, no basis for argument exists, for an objective divine cause and architect of the knowable universe; since it subsists only within the rational creature's mind, and has its full cause in his own faculties of sense and intellect.

By denying the knowableness of realities outside and independent of the mind, and reducing what the generality of men have accepted and treated as a vastly extended and knowable universe to a system of subjective phenomena, he would seem to abandon every ground for arguing to a divine cause except the mind of the rational subject and its productive and constructive processes, and the community of rational subjects. But he does not even retain this much; for he holds that no man knows his own mind as it really is in itself, or the minds of other men as they really are, but only appearances or mental states.⁵ Evidently, unknowable mind or minds can form no basis for the inference of any other being. There is

⁵ "In no way whatsoever can we know anything of the nature of our soul, so far as the possibility of its separate existence is concerned," etc. (Pure Reason, p. 801). "We know ourself as a phenomenon only, and not as it is by itself" (p. 761). "I have no knowledge of myself as I am, but only as I appear to myself" (pp. 761, 762).

nothing left then as a ground for argument to any reality distinct from and higher than the mind, save the appearances of the mind and the constructive operations going on with them. It is however a notable fact that Kant seems never to regard the mental phenomena as a worthy or proper ground for arguing to a higher mind as the ultimate author. He generally treats the soul with its faculties or functions as if it were self-existent and self-sustained, requiring no cause beyond itself; treats it as producing the apparent universe, but as itself produced by nothing or as if self-caused.

In excluding from knowledge all things as they exist in themselves, both external things and even the mind itself, and in restricting knowledge to internal phenomena alone, the states or determinations of the mind, Kant exhibits one of the most remarkable spectacles of all philosophical history; namely, the spectacle of a philosopher most strenuously backing off, most resolutely and persistently pulling himself away, from reality. He zealously degrades reality and the knowable to a minimum. He resolves to content himself with a knowledge of internal appearance, of appearance that is to no extent the true appearance or representation of anything.

All goes to show how impossible it was for Kant consistently to hold to a God knowable by intellectual or scientific knowledge. He gave up the traditional arguments for God because of their supposed defects; but he gave up a great deal more than these in abandoning all reality, or knowable reality, independent of our thoughts, upon which an argument might be founded for the existence of a God independent of our thoughts—of a God as an infinite Cause of an external infinite spatial universe and of finite minds, gifted with remarkable endowments or faculties, which were not self-created or self-existent. He very consistently asserts, as was observed above, that “no satisfactory proof from merely

speculative reason is possible in support of a Being corresponding to our transcendental idea."

Yet though Kant thus so decidedly declares the impossibility, on the principles and postulates accepted by him, of a speculative or scientific knowledge of God, he is very far from resigning himself to the theological agnosticism or blank atheism which would seem to be logically involved. He as earnestly and vigorously contends for what he regards as a noble practical theism as he contends against a speculative theism. There is, he still pleads, a genuine and admirable theology; but it has its foundation wholly in the laws of morality ordained by our practical or moral reason.

"All attempts," says Kant, "at a purely speculative use of reason, with reference to theology, are entirely useless and intrinsically null and void, while the principles of their natural use can never lead to any theology, so that unless we depend on moral laws, or are guided by them, there cannot be any theology of reason" (p. 512). He says also: "This moral theology has this peculiar advantage over speculative theology, that it leads inevitably to the concept of a *sole, most perfect, and rational* first Being, to which speculative theology does not even *lead us on*, on objective grounds, much less give us a *conviction* of it" (p. 653).

A primary expedient of Kant, of which note has already been made, is the sharp division of reason, or the employment of reason, into the theoretical or scientific and the practical or moral. He withdraws true theology entirely from the domain of the theoretical reason, and then assigns it to the domain of the practical reason. The theoretical reason is supposed to have no importance for religion. It gives us not the least real help to getting hold upon or discovering the primary object of religion, God; it furnishes no way of passing from the "primitive" and "necessary" idea of God, which it itself produces, to a corresponding object. Only practical reason is of service in apprehending God. In this wise the practical reason

has primacy over the theoretical. Morality, or the law of the moral reason, demands for its own support or its own interests, the postulate of a God as the governor of nature; and on that ground alone, without any theoretic or scientific knowledge, the postulate deserves to be accepted as true. By this scheme Kant fulfils in religion his significant general proposition regarding the objective validity of the ideas of reason: "I had to remove *knowledge* in order to make room for belief" (p. 700).

Kant's division of reason, or the use of reason, into theoretical and practical, and the assignment of primacy to the practical in morality and religion, have had an immense influence upon the subsequent theistic and ethical ontology and epistemology, and seem in latter days to be more influential than ever. This is manifest in the discussions of "Intellectualism" and "Voluntarism"; in the propaganda of "pragmatism"; in the very superior place ascribed to "value-judgments" over intellectual or existential judgments. Practical need, serviceableness, utility, has been given primacy in general ontology and epistemology. It has been avowed that the useful is true, that practical value is the criterion of reality. Says Kaftan: "The relation to the Will and our practical purposes is the sole measure of reality given to us."⁶

From this general view we proceed to consider the peculiar character and course of Kant's moral proof of the existence of God with some special attention, in order to obtain a true idea of its real worth, and to ascertain how well it justifies the great claims made for it by Kant and his followers. The main line of argument runs in this wise: The moral law commands us to make the *summum bonum* the ultimate object of our endeavors. The *summum bonum* consists of two elements, morality or virtue and happiness. Virtue is the "first and principal element" ("it is the worth of the person, and his worthi-

⁶ The Truth of the Christian Religion (Ferries tr.), II, p. 289.

ness to be happy"); happiness is the inferior element, it is conditioned by virtue.⁷ Practical reason demands that the virtuous — those who are governed by the unselfish and imperative sense of duty — shall obtain a degree of happiness proportionate to their virtue. Now since it is made a duty, a moral necessity, for the finite rational agent to realize and promote the *summum bonum*, it must be possible; but it is not entirely possible for the rational agent himself, because he is not the cause of the world and nature. He cannot then make nature harmonize with his moral mission and facilitate the accomplishment of it. He cannot bring nature to favor him so that he shall receive the degree of happiness he conceives is due his virtue. Besides, unintelligent nature could not of itself distribute happiness in exact proportion to virtue.⁸ It is then necessary to believe in the existence of God, a being who is the cause and ruler of nature; who possesses adequate power to control nature so that it shall be in harmony with and promote the interests of morality — the happiness of the virtuous — and possesses the intelligence necessary to understand the true relation between virtue and happiness, or the exact correspondence happiness should have to virtue. This is the substance of Kant's moral proof of the existence of God. In brief,

⁷ "Virtue and happiness together constitute the possession of the *summum bonum* in a person, and the distribution of happiness in exact proportion to morality (which is the worth of the person, and his worthiness to be happy) constitutes the *summum bonum* of a possible world; hence this *summum bonum* expresses the whole, the perfect good, in which, however, virtue as the condition is always the supreme good, since it has no condition above it; whereas happiness, while it is pleasant to the possessor of it, is not of itself absolutely and in all respects good, but always pre-supposes morally right behaviour as its condition" (Prac. Reason, pp. 206, 207). "Morality is the supreme good (as the first condition of the *summum bonum*), while happiness constitutes its second element, but only in such a way that it is the morally conditioned, but necessary consequence of the former" (p. 215).

⁸ "The acting rational being in the world is not the cause of the world and of nature itself. There is not the least ground, therefore, in the moral law for a necessary connexion between morality and proportionate happiness in a being that belongs to the world as part of it and therefore dependent on it, and which for that reason cannot by his will be a cause of this nature, nor by his own power make it thoroughly harmonise, as far as his happiness is concerned, with his practical principles" (Prac. Reason, p. 221).

we may or must believe in or postulate a God as necessary to the "possibility of the *summum bonum*." ⁹

It should be attentively observed that Kant assumes the existence of God, not as necessary to the possibility of the whole of the *summum bonum*, but only of one of its two elements, and that the inferior element, namely, happiness. Kant never postulates a God as necessary to the possibility of the "first and principal element" of the *summum bonum*, virtue or morality. More fully it should be noted, that he does not treat God as the author of the community of moral rational agents in the world, or as the supreme object of their moral reverence, or as the producer of moral law, or the inspirer of moral life, or as himself having ordained that virtue shall be accompanied by proportionate happiness, or as having made it a duty to promote the *summum bonum*; that is to say, he does not postulate a God as necessary for any of the greater objects and concerns of morality, but only, or primarily, as the agent of the rather subordinate office of securing for the virtuous the happiness which they think they ought to have. Kant regards man as morally autonomous, as giving moral law to himself and obeying it of himself, as the sole author of his own virtue.¹⁰ To assume that men are dependent upon God for the moral law and

⁹ "It was seen to be a duty for us to promote the *summum bonum*; consequently it is not merely allowable but it is a necessity connected with duty as a requisite, that we should pre-suppose the possibility of this *summum bonum*, and as this is possible only on condition of the existence of God, it inseparably connects the supposition of this with duty; that is, it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God" (p. 222).

"It is a duty to realize the *summum bonum* to the utmost of our power, therefore it must be possible, consequently it is unavoidable for every rational being in the world to assume what is necessary for its objective possibility. The assumption is as necessary as the moral law, in connexion with which alone it is valid" (p. 242).

"In a mere course of nature in the world an accurate correspondence between happiness and moral worth is not to be expected, and must be regarded as impossible, and therefore the possibility of the *summum bonum* cannot be admitted from this side except on the supposition of a moral Author of the world" (p. 243).

¹⁰ "What man is or ought to be in a moral sense he must make or must have made himself." "Duty commands nothing that is not practicable to us" (Theory of Religion (Abbott), p. 352 and p. 356).

for virtue would be postulating a species of heteronomy to which Kant is always decidedly opposed. He will not accept moral law even from God; he firmly claims autonomy. The supreme moral object for men is the moral law, which they produce of themselves and impose upon themselves.¹¹ In his moral theory the finite rational agent is really greater than God, for he performs a higher order of work. To produce moral law and moral character, to decree happiness, to ordain the *summum bonum*, are functions far superior to that of merely providing the inferior constituent of the *summum bonum*, happiness, by manipulating physical nature. Besides, it would seem that the agent who can perform these paramount functions ought to be able to procure the happiness he decrees for himself, without any aid or interposition at all of a God or moral necessity for postulating his existence. To attribute to man the whole power to acquire the "supreme good"—morality—and to deny him the power to acquire the inferior good—the appropriate happiness—is discordant and arbitrary. It is therefore quite evident that Kant's moral theology has in fact a very narrow connection with morality. The God he assumes has little to do with what is supreme in morality; his moral importance is comparatively inconsiderable. As far as our investigation has gone, we seem to be justified even in the conclusion that Kant's moral theistic proof is one of the most oddly conceived and frail arguments ever offered by philosopher for the existence of God or for belief in

¹¹ It is not meant that "it is necessary to suppose the existence of God as a basis of all obligation in general (for this rests, as has been sufficiently proved, simply on the autonomy of reason itself)" (Prac. Reason, p. 222).

Autonomy of the will "is the supreme principle of morality" (p. 59).

"Ethical legislation cannot be external (not even that of a divine will)" (p. 275).

Kant is expressly opposed to introducing "an external arbitrary legislation of a Supreme Being in place of an internal necessary legislation of Reason" (Critique of Judgement (Bernard tr.), p. 394). He says further: "Laws which Reason itself does not give and whose observance it does not bring about as a pure practical faculty, cannot be moral" (p. 423).

God. Praise has been lavished upon it by some who have not studied it enough to ascertain what it really is and how intrinsically poor it is.

Let us go on to consider one or two significant features of Kant's doctrine not yet sufficiently dwelt upon; namely, the real character of the faith in God, or apprehension of him, which we have by the practical reason; and the real nature of the primacy assigned to the practical reason over the theoretical in theology.

This faith or apprehension is not real knowledge at all. It effects not the least increase of the knowledge we have by the theoretical reason; it leads us not a step out of the total ignorance of the theoretical reason regarding the objective reality of God. All that the practical reason accomplishes in theology beyond the theoretical, is to encourage us to think, hope, and act as if there were an objective God corresponding to the necessary idea of God produced by the theoretical reason; a God who is willing, and as the author and governor of nature is able, to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, that is, to make the connection between virtue and happiness sure, and in that manner and so far support the interests of morality — of morality which is supposed to be otherwise, or in its main constituents, altogether independent of him. Therefore the God, or the theistic ideal, of practical reason has only a "practical application," serves only a "practical use," "practical purposes." Practical reason has no proof, and can make no permissible presumption, of a real objective God.

These and other fundamental positions of Kant enable us to discern the real character of the alleged primacy of the practical reason over the speculative in religion. The practical has no "insight" respecting the existence and nature of God penetrating deeper than that of the speculative; it must not presume to "contradict" the latter (*Prac. Reason*, p. 216); and effects not the slightest

enlargement of its knowledge, or reduction of its ignorance, of the objective being of God (p. 234); but only urges to a practical application of the idea of God.¹² It would then appear that in fact the primacy ascribed by Kant to the practical reason amounts to very little, is indeed quite insignificant. Besides, practical purposes that do not concern themselves with known realities cannot in their turn be worthy of much concern. The real truth is that instead of giving primacy to the practical over the speculative reason, Kant always in effect places practical reason in subordination to the speculative.

It is a noticeable practice of Kant to make express claims for his practical theism far beyond what it warrants. The theory is to that extent one of unsustained pretensions and promises. For instance, he says: Faith of pure practical reason in God

"can never be reduced to unbelief" (*Prac. Reason*, p. 244). The existence of God is one of those ideas "the possibility of which no human intelligence will ever fathom, but the truth of which, on the other hand, no sophistry will ever wrest from the conviction even of the commonest man" (p. 231). "A want or requirement of pure reason in its speculative use leads only to a *hypothesis*; that of pure practical reason to a *postulate*" (p. 240). "This moral theology has this peculiar advantage over speculative theology, that it leads inevitably to the concept of a *sole, most perfect, and rational* first Being" (*Pure Reason*, p. 653). "What I really mean is, that the belief in a God and in another world is so interwoven with my moral sentiment that, as there is little danger of my losing the latter, there is quite as little fear lest I should ever be deprived of the former" (p. 665).

It does not seem it should be hard to shake faith in an unknown God who is assumed as a necessary cause only to procure the happiness the finite agent has of

¹² "The word 'belief' refers only to the guidance which an idea gives me, and to its subjective influence on the conduct of my reason, which makes me hold it fast, though I may not be able to give an account of it from a speculative point of view" (*Pure Reason*, p. 663).

himself decreed as a reward for his entirely self-acquired virtue. God is indeed postulated for a purpose; but not as a necessary cause of anything of foremost importance in morality — the moral law, virtue, the sense of duty, for these we obtain of ourselves, without God; but only of happiness, the inferior element of the *summum bonum* and conditioned by the superior element, virtue; which is not necessary like virtue, and which men, in their rapture of regard and devotion to the moral law, might possibly get along without and surrender the postulate of the necessity of a God. Again, faith in God is here represented as being thoroughly “interwoven” with our “moral sentiment” and of as certain tenure. But according to Kant’s main teaching, this faith is really very slightly and imperfectly interwoven with our moral sentiment, or moral thought and feeling. God is conceived as having no relation at all to the production and necessary sustentation of moral law and duty. Our own practical reason is held to originate moral law and all sense of obligation quite independently of the existence of God. In this conception, faith in God is not interwoven with anything of primary significance in our moral experience and welfare. Obviously then, according to Kant’s central and indisputable didactic, as remarked before, belief in God has a rather dubious moral connection and foundation. His enthusiastic assumptions as to its tenacity and perpetuity have but little justification. The belief is not justly assimilable, as to strength and endurance, to the conviction of duty which is produced directly within, by our own practical reason in entire independence of the agency of God, and seemingly might much more easily be lost. If he had contended that a God must be assumed as the cause of the kingdom of moral agents and of moral law, as a divine helper for moral living and attainment of moral worth (the chief constituent of the *summum bonum*), as well as the provider of corre-

sponding happiness, the belief in God would have had real moral importance reckoned to it; and much passionate assurance might naturally have been felt and expressed. To many, as it seems, Kant's argument has appeared the more plausible because they have not attentively noted how little, according to its capital positions, God has to do with morality; and often his readers have helped his argument out by their own strong moral predilections and prepossessions. There is much to substantiate the general judgment that so far as Kant felt the assurance expressed in the above citations, it had its real occasion in his speculative reason, and was confusedly and mistakingly ascribed to his practical reason.

The logical and final conclusion of Kant's moral theology amounts only to this: that we must assume a God practically, as the necessary procurer of happiness for the autonomously virtuous, while at the same time we are conscious that we have not the least ground for an intellectual knowledge of God as an objective reality. Practical reason gives us no real or scientific knowledge of God, it provides no means or method of bridging the gulf between the internal idea we possess from speculative reason and a corresponding being; it only encourages a sort of mystic faith in his existence. What Kant says in speaking of speculative theology is found to be the utmost that can be truthfully said of the practical: "Thus we are led to say, for instance, that the things of the world must be considered *as if* they owed their existence to some supreme intelligence; and the idea is thus a heuristic only, not an ostensive concept, showing us not how an object is really constituted, but how we, under the guidance of that concept, should look for the constitution and connection of the objects of experience in general" (*Pure Reason*, p. 539). The belief of the practical theology in God comes in the end to be but little if anything more than just a readiness to act, and

to trust for happiness, *as if there were* a Supreme Being of wisdom presiding over nature, of whom we have no knowledge. This result is very meagre in itself; certainly it is very meagre for so much theologizing, and quite unsatisfactory. In brief, Kant's moral theology is an hypothesis of large promises but of very disappointing fulfilment.

Several of the fundamental principles or postulates of Kant's theology, of which the conclusions of his practical theology just considered are the outcome, deserve a somewhat more extended notice than we have yet given them. *First*, Kant contends that by reason we possess a "primitive" and "necessary" idea of God; that the idea is entirely produced by reason without borrowing anything from the senses or understanding, and without receiving help from any source or without subjection to control because of relation to anything. The postulation of an idea of this character is of very questionable warrant. We have, no doubt, an idea of God as the author and ruler of the world; but the idea cannot be called "necessary," in the sense that it is produced by reason as if acting under an *a priori* compulsion; nor "primitive," in the sense that it is produced at once full-formed, by the momentary creative action of reason and without a process of intellection. Further, there is no adequate evidence that the idea of God is produced by any faculty of mind acting in entire freedom from external influence. This idea seems to owe much to the operations of external things upon the mind, and not to owe all to the independent, wholly unaffected production of reason. And the great strength of the conviction of God's existence seems not to be *a priori* but rather experiential, dependent upon the frequency of external occasions.

It was a confident assumption of Kant that there is no sure passage from the internal idea to an external object, or that the conviction that the idea of God has objective

validity is a scholastic illusion. He says in respect to the idea of God: "The conditions of the objective validity of my concepts are excluded by the idea itself" (*Pure Reason*, p. 543); and goes on to assert that we are altogether without authority to affirm the existence of a being merely from the possession of the conception of such a being. He holds that there cannot be a cognition of an external reality as it is in itself, "considering that we always depend on representations which are inside us" (p. 307).

We must grant that there cannot be an immediate knowledge or consciousness of a reality distinct from us or outside; for such knowledge never goes beyond our ideas or representations — of God or any species of external reality; for our immediate knowledge or consciousness is restricted by the most rigid determination to the affections and the confines of the self. If all our knowledge or all our experience were only immediate, then it would follow inevitably that we could have no experience of anything but our self and our ideas; we could know nothing of anything severed from us, certainly nothing of anything as it exists in itself. We should be compelled to submit to the idealistic conclusions of Kant. But we are not under logical compulsion to give up the possibility of a true mediate or representative knowledge of an external object through an idea as formed under the influence of the object. Every idea is wholly mental and produced by the mind; but the mind is still much affected by objects in forming its ideas of them. The particular attributes of objects occasion the mind to give particular attributes to its ideas. In this manner it may come about that ideas of realities outside the sphere of immediate experience, animate and inanimate, small and great, including our idea of God, which are themselves wholly within immediate experience, being pure modes of mind or self, shall be not only bare ideas but ideas in

which we have a cognitive hold upon the relative or corresponding external objects.

Secondly, it is fundamental with Kant and many moralists influenced by him, that the knowledge of the moral law or obligation, or the "categorical imperative," precedes and occasions the knowledge of God, and that the knowledge of God does not precede the knowledge of the moral law. Here again is an assumption of very doubtful validity. It is indeed the very heart of Kant's theology; but it is open to grave question. There is good ground for believing in the reverse order of events.

Respecting the primitive production by reason of the moral law, it is important to conceive and define precisely what is meant by moral law. Some mean by moral law or the categorical imperative, a norm, precept, statute for action, as the Golden Rule, or Kant's modification of it: "Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (*Prac. Reason*, p. 38). Others mean by moral law the imperative feeling of duty or oughtness. Kant seems to use "moral law" and "categorical imperative" in both these senses, without precise discrimination. The two modes of law subsist in the closest association; the moral feeling always enforces the moral statute; but they are yet distinct in their character and origin. The one is subjective, the other objective.

Moral law as norm or statute for conduct we certainly come to possess with the clearest cognition; but it cannot be properly supposed to be a natural and necessary production of our reason. It cannot be assumed to be the *a priori* deliverance of reason uninfluenced by the observation of the facts and conditions of our life and by intellectual incubation.

Moral law taken as feeling, the feeling of duty or oughtness, is quite different from the moral precept and from the intellectual process by which the latter seems to

be apprehended. This feeling belongs to the emotional nature. It is to be regarded as a special and original variety of emotional experience, a new "variation," and not as just derived from or compounded of sensations or other modes of feeling, as those of fear, sympathy, retaliation. It is an original part of the matter of experience supplied by the "inner sense." The feeling enters into a peculiarly close alliance with moral precepts, becoming an immediate enforcing power.

The relation of the moral feeling to our knowledge of God or faith in his existence is a particular matter of our present consideration. In respect to this, Kant seems to mistake very seriously. He reverses the true succession of events. The faith in God, instead of following the rise of the moral feeling, really foreruns and occasions it. The history of the primitive races and conditions of men and their progress to full development, does not prove that the moral feeling preceded belief in the Supreme Being, but rather that some degree of belief in the Supreme Being or the gods preceded the moral feeling; and in its own development in clearness, purity, and fullness, leads the feeling in a parallel development in purity and strength. Antecedent faith or knowledge does not generate the moral feeling; but it appears to have been always an important or indispensable occasion for the wakening and evolution of the feeling existing before as an original emotion potentiality.

Thirdly, Kant and many others assume that it is altogether feasible for men to act with practical purposes and enduring satisfaction as if there were a God, while disclaiming all real knowledge of him as an objective being; to act upon value-judgments in the entire lack of genuine reality-judgments. They presume impossibilities. Men cannot be permanently content to ascribe high value for any purposes to mere appearances or illusions. They cannot practise for long such a mode of self-deception.

They will be satisfied only with obligations and purposes that have relation to known reality.

There is no disputing the great attention we give to things and our eager pursuit of them and strong conviction of their reality, because they serve our purposes, wishes, uses, and contribute to our gratification; but these facts should not lead us to ignore or depreciate the fact of our perception of things as possessing a real permanent existence and definite character in themselves apart from and altogether independently of us. Our judgments of their discrete being and qualities are as certain as our judgments of their value. The two modes of judgment may rarely or never be sharply severed, because of the near relation of things to us in the same world, and their constant effect upon our welfare; nevertheless, they are in themselves most evidently distinct, and demand recognition as such. The votaries of practical reason generally greatly undervalue the importance of the intellectual perception of realities and their external existence independent of our cognition and of our purposes and desires. Though their importance for us is chiefly in their utility, yet things have as certain being and properties as have we ourselves with our aims, wishes, interests. We have the benefits of, but we do not make, their reality. It is a hollow peace that was arranged by Kant between the theoretical reason and the practical reason, according to which we are to be satisfied to act as if there were a God, while we are still conscious that we have not the least theoretical or scientific knowledge of him.